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ABSTRACT

In 1995, the Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) school district began an initiative aimed at improving student achievement titled the Children Achieving initiative. This reform agenda introduced 10 components that included local decision making, development of standards, and increased professional development for staff. The Children Achieving agenda is likely to affect another ongoing effort to improve schools, the federal Title I schoolwide program. To examine the impact on the Title I implementation projects in the School District of Philadelphia, this study focused on four inner-city elementary schools, each of which represented a different "cluster." One school had a predominantly Hispanic American population, another had a significant Asian limited English proficient population, and the other two had largely African American enrollments. The study examined how the latest reform facilitated the integration of curriculum and instruction for Title I students, and how new policy initiatives provide the technical and professional support to help teachers use instructional strategies that benefit Title I students. Also studied was how the reform agenda facilitates policy coordination or widens organizational fragmentation at different levels of the school system. Case studies of the four schools show that the two school-reform strategies of Children Achieving, standardized and centralized policies and the development of structures for lateral communication, find substantial congruence with Title I schoolwide programs. Both reforms regard parent and community involvement, local decision making, early intervention through full day kindergarten, and support for professional development as integral components. It is not yet clear whether both programs are providing the increased learning time and content coverage that are central to improving academic achievement. (Contains 1 table and 18 references.) (SLD)

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Laboratory for Student Success

The Effect of Local Reform on Title I Schoolwide Programs in Philadelphia

by
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The University of Chicago

and

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North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

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THE EFFECT OF LOCAL REFORM ON TITLE I SCHOOLWIDE PROGRAMS IN PHILADELPHIA

City Reform Context

Shortly after he assumed the office of Superintendent of Schools in Philadelphia in February, 1995, David Hornbeck launched a major reform initiative aimed at improving student achievement titled *Children Achieving*. This reform agenda introduced ten components that included support for local decisionmaking, the development of standards, and increased professional development opportunities for staff (see Appendix for a summary of the reform agenda).[1] As a result of the plan, the district is being reorganized into 22 "clusters" of elementary, middle, and senior high schools based on feeder patterns. Within each cluster, schools are expected to encourage planning and decisionmaking around small learning communities. Teaching and learning networks for professional development are being established that encourage in-class observation and provide feedback on teaching and learning practices. The proposed agenda includes a reallocation of resources from the central office to the clusters and additional resources for professional development and full-day kindergartens. During the spring of 1995, six clusters were established as one of the first steps in implementing the *Children Achieving* agenda.[2]

The *Children Achieving* reform agenda is likely to affect another ongoing effort to improve inner-city schools in Philadelphia—the federal Title I schoolwide programs. These schoolwide programs are intended to distribute supplemental instruction and aid to all children in low-income schools as a whole, rather than targeting aid to certain disadvantaged students who are pulled out of their regular classrooms for additional instruction. The School District of Philadelphia began implementing schoolwide projects under the 1988 legislation that first made the projects viable. During the first year of implementation (1988-89), 31 out of 150 Title I schools in the district were implementing schoolwide projects. Over the next 5 years, the district increased the number of schoolwide sites. By 1995-96 when

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[1]See The School District of Philadelphia, *Children Achieving Action Design 1995-1999*, February 6, 1995 for a detailed account of the reform agenda. Key indicators of the reform are summarized in the appendix.

[2]See Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Research for Action, OMG Center for Collaborative Learning, *A First-Year Evaluation Report of Children Achieving: Philadelphia's Education Reform*. Philadelphia: CPRE, 1996 for a report on the first year of reform in the Philadelphia school district.

we conducted our research, all 168 Title I schools in Philadelphia were schoolwide sites. Presently, 70% of the schools in the district have schoolwide projects (168 out of a total of 240 schools).

To support the use of schoolwide projects under the 1988 legislation, the district developed a structure that included the establishment of a school improvement planning process and instructional support teams that operated from regional offices within the district. Reform efforts focused on providing support for school re-organization that included developing mechanisms for site-based decisionmaking and the school improvement planning process. Professional development was aimed at all the teachers in the school, not just the teachers in special needs programs. Under the current reform agenda, this structure is being phased out and replaced with clusters, small learning communities, and teaching and learning networks. The new supporting structures—clusters and small learning communities—are being organized to increase linkages between different schools and within the same schools, as well as shift decisionmaking closer to the school site. The teaching and learning networks are intended to facilitate the work of teachers in their efforts to improve classroom instruction.[3] Standards are being developed that will apply to all schools and that will guide instruction and assessment. The first set of these standards were introduced in the schools at the start of the 1996-97 school year.

Research Design

To examine the impact of local reform on the implementation of Title I schoolwide projects in the School District of Philadelphia, we selected four inner-city elementary schools that each represents a different cluster. Socioeconomic characteristics of the schools were considered in making the selection. One school, for example, has a predominately Hispanic population, another has a significant Asian LEP population. The two remaining schools have predominately African-American populations. The socioeconomic characteristics of the selected schools are presented in Table 1. School visits, staff interviews, and classroom observations were conducted in May 1996. Also, documentary materials were collected from the district office and school sites. In November 1996, a follow-up visit was made to each of the four schools to interview principals and a sample of third and fourth grade teachers. Additionally,

[3]Personal interview with central office administrator, School District of Philadelphia, May 15, 1996.

administrators were interviewed in the four cluster offices and documentary materials collected from the cluster and district offices.

Table 1: Background Characteristics, Selected Schools with a Title I Schoolwide Project, School District of Philadelphia

School*	Grades	Size	AFDC	Yancey Poverty Index	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
Lucy	K-8	989	64.2%	90.7%	1.0%	82.0%	16.0%	1.0%
George	K-4	380	76.6%	95.8%	0.5%	98.2%	0.5%	0.8%
Frank	K-4	794	75.1%	95.6%	0.9%	37.8%	0.8%	60.6%
Jane	pre K-5	409	72.9%	95.1%	0.2%	99.5%	0.0%	0.2%

Source: Office of Standards, Equity and Student Service, Department of Accountability and Assessment, School District of Philadelphia.
*School names are fictitious.

Analytical Perspectives

In analyzing the implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda, there is evidence of fragmentation on two levels: (a) curricular and instructional fragmentation in the classroom, where teachers separate children into groups by ability and instruct these groups differently, (b) institutional fragmentation at the district level, where administrative authority is simultaneously claimed by different departments and actors. Implementing a schoolwide program is a strategy designed to reduce curricular and instructional fragmentation in the classroom (Barr and Dreeben, 1984; Wong, 1994). To reduce institutional fragmentation at the district level, competition between various authorities is coordinated to support systemwide policy goals. When examining the effects of the reform in Philadelphia schools on the delivery of services for at-risk students, it must be noted how the reform agenda reduces both classroom and instructional fragmentation. We also analyze how the reform agenda links Title I services with the larger educational program so that reform is more effective and has a positive impact.

Prior to 1988, Title I programs were characterized by curricular and instructional fragmentation in the delivery of services to eligible students (Wong and Wang, 1994). To ensure local compliance with federal mandates, Title I regulations promoted the use of categorical programs to provide supplemental services to low-achieving, disadvantaged students. Students were often "pulled out" of their regular classroom and placed in another, often remedial, instructional setting as an administrative way to meet

the federal auditing requirements. Despite the wide-spread use of pullouts, there was dissatisfaction with this practice. A 1983 survey of district-level program coordinators found that 73% of the respondents used pullouts mainly to comply with auditing regulations, and "only 18% of district administrators who used a pullout design indicated that they believed it was educationally superior to any other mode of delivery" (Smith, 1988, p. 130). Moreover, instruction in pullout programs was often poorly integrated with that provided in the regular classroom (Kaestle and Smith, 1982; Johnston, Allington, and Walker, 1985). There was little coordination between Title I and the regular curriculum, and in most schools, coordination relied almost entirely on informal meetings and staff planning sessions that rarely occurred.

The schoolwide Title I legislation confronts the problem of fragmentation directly by permitting high-poverty schools to depart from the decade-long mandates on "supplement non-supplant," thereby eliminating the major obstacle to service integration within the classroom. Several national trends in classroom organization have emerged following the implementation of the Hawkins-Stafford Amendments. First, an increasing number of Title I schools are beginning to combine pullout programs with in-class strategies, although the former remain by far the most widely used instructional arrangements. Between 1985 and 1990, one study found that "there has been almost a 50% increase in the number of districts offering in-class instruction" (Millsap, et al., 1992). Another study reported that several districts have adopted computer-assisted instruction for the whole class (Stringfield, Billig, and Davis, 1991). Further, recent federal reform has facilitated district activities to promote parental involvement. Between 1987 and 1990, more districts reported "disseminating home-based education activities to reinforce classroom instruction," and using liaison staff to coordinate parent activities (Millsap, et al., 1992). Finally, local districts are directing greater attention to instructional issues, such as whether pullout practices are educationally sound (Slavin, Karweit, and Madden, 1989). In short, the schoolwide initiative has created new opportunities to improve service coordination in the classroom.

In previous research, the manner in which school-level organization facilitated effective implementation of schoolwide projects and contributed to improved student performance was identified (Wong, Sunderman, and Lee, 1995). Even in schools with schoolwide projects, there existed observable differences in how the program was organized. In some schools, different expectations were maintained

for different students, even after several years as a schoolwide project. This allowed for instructional fragmentation in terms of curriculum and expectations for Title I eligible students versus expectations for other students in the school. In contrast, other schools maintained similar academic expectations for all students and claimed, consequently, that the schoolwide project provided increased benefits to Title I students because they spent more time with their regular classroom teachers and received additional exposure to the regular curriculum. As a result, these schools exhibited a higher degree of instructional integration than schools that maintained different expectations for different students. Moreover, we found that these interschool differences are in part due to district po'icies that influenced the design of Title I programs and the instructional practices used by teachers.

Another line of research focuses on institutional fragmentation at the district level. The implementation of a reform agenda is either constrained or facilitated by the complex nature of the authority system at the top (Wong and Sunderman, 1996; Wong et al., 1996). In urban school districts, multiple centers of power exist both inside and outside the school system (Wong, 1995; Tyack & Hansot, 1982, Meyer, 1980). Incoherence in implementing educational policy can result when these institutional actors compete for authority over important policy issues. For example, the state and federal levels of government impose mandates on the schools that influence programmatic demands and bureaucratic organization. Other organizations, including teacher unions, interest groups, and other policy organizations, frequently compete with the school board for influence over district policy. Within the central administration itself, various departments frequently operate independently of the general superintendent's office in response to external mandates (such as categorical programs), and policy is often disconnected from the needs of the classroom.

Institutional coordination at the district level, on the other hand, is achieved when the number of competing authorities is reduced and the activities of the various institutional actors is coordinated to support system wide policy goals (Wong, et al., 1996). To achieve coherent institutional policies for all students, states and districts are likely to experiment with alternative support structures. These may include a proper balance between incentives and regulations, as well as a redefinition of accountability at the school site (Fuhrman, 1993).

Research Design

To examine the impact of local reform in Philadelphia on the implementation of Title I schoolwide projects, we selected four inner-city elementary schools that each represents a different cluster. Socioeconomic characteristics of the schools were considered in making the selection. One school, for example, has a predominately Hispanic population, another has a significant Asian LEP population. The two remaining schools are predominately African-American. The socioeconomic characteristics of the selected schools are presented in table 1. School visits, staff interviews, and classroom observations were conducted in May 1996, and documentary materials collected from the district office and school sites. In November 1996, a follow-up visit was made to each of the four schools to interview principals and a sample of third and fourth grade teachers. Additionally, administrators were interviewed in the four cluster offices and documentary materials collected from the cluster and district offices.

Summary of Findings

Our study examines three challenges that confront Title I schoolwide projects in the School District of Philadelphia as they respond to the *Children Achieving* agenda, including:

(a) How does the latest reform facilitate the integration of curriculum and instruction for Title I students with that provided for the rest of the school?

(b) To what extent do the new policy initiatives provide the technical and professional support necessary to help teachers adopt instructional strategies that benefit Title I students?

(c) Does the reform agenda facilitate policy coordination or widen organizational fragmentation at different levels of the school system?

Keeping these challenges in mind, we examine the implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda at three levels of the school system: district, cluster/school, and classroom. At each level, we pay

particular attention to the impact of reform on curricular and instructional integration, teacher development, and organizational fragmentation. Our findings include the following:

- At the district level, we found that competition and contention between institutions persisted, inhibiting the implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda.
- At the cluster and school levels, the *Children Achieving* agenda altered the organization of the district and schools into feeder patterns that increased linkages between schools and brought needed services closer to the school level, thereby enhancing the implementation of the reform agenda. The implementation of small learning communities within the schools showed promise as a strategy to increase communication between teachers.
- At the classroom level, curriculum and instructional practices continued to be shaped by strategies that were in place before the implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda, or were limited by existing mandates. In some cases, the new reform agenda was simply added on top of previously existing policies and reforms.

Political Conflicts Frustrate the Reform Process at the District Level

Implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda has been inhibited by conflicts at the district level and by the political climate in Philadelphia. Contract negotiations between the union and central administration threatened the reform initiative when the union opposed the superintendent's plan for merit-based pay. The implementation of the reform agenda was further constrained by a funding crisis created by insufficient state funding and competing demands on resources from a desegregation court order. Finally, a state judge ordered the district to include specific programs in the school budget to address a 25-year old desegregation suit, thereby creating a competing set of priorities to the *Children Achieving* agenda.

Conflict between the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) and the district administration threatened the negotiations of a new teachers contract in spring of 1996. The PFT opposed Superintendent David Hornbeck's plan for merit-based pay that would tie teacher compensation to student success by rewarding the faculties of schools that improve and sanctioning those where student achievement declines. Conflict over this proposal resulted in a split between Hornbeck and two top

members of the negotiating team, who resigned over the issue in March of 1996.[4] A contract agreement was reached when the mayor's office intervened to prevent a teachers strike during an election year.

The PFT continued it's offensive against the district's accountability system upon the release of school performance ratings in early 1997. The performance ratings, reported in school "report cards" for each of the 257 schools, showed that fewer than half of the 215,000 students are meeting basic academic expectations for their grade level in reading, math, and science.[5] The PFT claimed the numbers on student test scores included in the report cards were intentionally low, misleading, and designed to exaggerate any subsequent improvement—which would translate into bonuses for administrators. The union publicly attacked the standardized test plan and rating system as "a fraud," exclaiming that "This isn't students achieving, it's administrators deceiving."[6]

Other evidence of administrative conflict within the district was the School Board's recent opposition to Hornbeck's decision to hire a new top-level administrator. When Hornbeck began the selection process to hire a new Associate Superintendent for Leadership and Learning, the Board questioned whether or not the position was necessary. They charged that the proposed $114,000 salary would strain an already tight budget. Hornbeck chose a veteran educator and top administrator from Detroit to fill the position, which the Board claimed could have been filled just as easily by promoting from within the district. After what newspapers described as "weeks of protests," "continuous sparring," and a "raucous" board meeting and with Hornbeck, the Board finally voted 5-2 (2 abstaining, 1 absent) to approve the hiring.[7]

In addition to being impeded by authority conflicts within the district, the implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda has also been constrained by budget deficits and little support from either the state or city for additional funding. In preparing the FY 1996-97 school budget, the district faced a $58 million deficit if funding was provided to continue existing programs, and a $148 million shortfall if the

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[4]The Philadelphia Inquirer, 5-22-96.

[5]The school report card includes standardized test scores, drop-out figures, attendance by students and teachers, and assigns the school a singe score to summarize its overall academic performance, thus permitting a ranking. Reported in Philadelphia Inquirer, 1-17-97.

[6]The Philadelphia Inquirer, 1-31-97.

[7]The Philadelphia Daily News, 1-28-97; also in Philadelphia Inquirer 1-28-97.

Children Achieving agenda was fully funded. State funding for Philadelphia schools, which amounts to about 60% of the budget, has been flat for several years. Moreover, Pennsylvania Governor Ridge's FY 1996-97 budget proposed a freeze in state aid to basic education and included no increases to account for inflation. The remaining funds are provided by the city. The city share of the district's budget has declined because of an eroding tax base.[8] Further cuts were expected in fiscal year 1996-97 because of a proposed city tax cut.

However, in a recent show of badly needed political support for the reform plan, Mayor Ed Rendell pledged his "unequivocal support" of Hornbeck and the *Children Achieving* agenda. In January, the Mayor announced that his proposed 1997-98 budget would include more funding for after school programs and possibly more funding for *Children Achieving* if revenue sources are secured.[9] But the revenue source is very uncertain, and whether mayoral support will sustain *Children Achieving* remains to be seen.

Local discretion has been further constrained by judicial decisions in a 25-year old desegregation suit. A Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court judge found the district was unconstitutionally failing to provide equal education to the 211,000 pupils in the district. The judge ordered the district not to cut desegregation funds and to take more than 40 specific steps to provide equal educational opportunity for students in the Philadelphia district. Among the judge's top priorities were programs to promote desegregation, full funding for preschool, and the expansion of full-day kindergarten, which the judge ordered Hornbeck to include in the school budget. Funding for these programs competed with funding for the *Children Achieving* agenda and delayed the planned expansion of the program districtwide. To accommodate the judge's priorities, the 1996-97 budget deferred almost all of Hornbeck's reform agenda, reallocating about $82 million out of the $90 million needed to implement reform.[10] At one point in this dispute, the judge held Hornbeck in contempt of court for failing to provide information on the cost of reorganizing and running the city schools in clusters. The contempt hearing was resolved

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[8] The Philadelphia Inquirer, 5-24-96.

[9] Ibid., 1-24-97.

[10] Ibid., 6-3-96.

when the district agreed to fund the $16.7 million in programs ordered by the judge whether or not the state provided extra money to fund them.[11] After extensive lobbying from the mayor's office and Philadelphia legislative leaders, and support from the Republican House Speaker and Senate Majority Leader, the state approved a budget that gave the district the additional funds needed to meet the judge's order. State aid to basic education for the other 500 school districts in Pennsylvania, however, was frozen.

The desegregation dispute entered the broader political arena when the city filed a suit claiming it was the state's obligation to fund the desegregation court order. The projected cost of funding all of the judge's recommended reforms is $900 million over 5 years.[12] The state responded by saying that under the education article of the constitution, "the commonwealth does not have an obligation to provide any particular level of state funds to school districts."[13] Further, the state countered that the city did not sufficiently support its school system. The mayor and state legislators continue to accuse each other of not shouldering enough of the financial responsibility for Philadelphia's schools.[14]

The fragmentation of authority at the city and state levels was exemplified in a recent announcement by two Pennsylvania state legislators of their respective plans to reorganize the Philadelphia school district. Upset by the dismal academic performance of Philadelphia's schools, two of the city's most powerful Democratic legislators are drawing up separate proposals to carve up the district into smaller, more locally controlled entities. Neither Hornbeck nor Rendell were aware of either of the proposals at the time they were announced. As the *Philadelphia Daily News* noted, this "raises serious questions of how much policy coordination exists among city leaders on major policy issues."[15]

Impact of Reform at Cluster/School Level

Reorganization of Professional Community: In the first year of reform (1995-96) under the *Children Achieving* agenda, the district established six clusters, began to develop the teaching and

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[11] Ibid., 6-7-96.

[12] The Philadelphia Daily News, 6-5-96.

[13] Ibid., 5-30-96.

[14] Philadelphia Inquirer, 1-24-97.

[15] The Philadelphia Daily News, 1-30-97.

learning networks through the clusters, and allocated additional money for professional development. Each cluster has a cluster support structure composed of a cluster coordinator, teaching and learning coordinator, and family resource network coordinator. A fourth position, the equity coordinator, was added in fall 1996 to ensure equity for Title I, bilingual, and special education students, and support for desegregation. During the spring of 1996, schools began planning for small learning communities to be implemented with the start of school in the fall of 1996. Within each school, staff decided how to structure the small learning communities and established a theme for each community. For example, Jane, a small elementary school, decided on two "horizontal" communities with kindergarten, first, and second grades in one community and third, fourth, and fifth grades in the other. Themes for both communities focused on technology and multiculturalism.

Teachers and principals reported that this reorganization on a cluster basis was a positive change as it facilitated more contact with the cluster office and improved linkages between schools. Much of this contact has been through participation in professional support activities sponsored by the cluster. For example, school staff were required to attend cluster meetings for "professional development" that included developing a school mission and planning for the school learning communities. Two clusters cooperated to provide training for other teachers in the cluster on "work sampling," a performance-based assessment procedure. Increased contact with other schools was also facilitated by the cluster organization, since all schools participated in group meetings by grade level sponsored by the cluster. As a result of these cluster meetings, some schools reported participating in joint activities with other schools in their cluster. Representing a clear departure from past practice, both principals and teachers were very positive about these linkages.

Small learning communities are another district initiated reorganization that holds the potential to encourage cooperation among teachers within a school. Planning for the communities took place in the spring of 1996, the physical reorganization of the schools into communities occurred over the summer, and the communities were in full operation by the start of the school year in September 1996. District guidelines, which govern the design of the communities, encourage small (less than 400 students), heterogeneous groupings of students and require each community to organize around a theme.

While there were differences between the schools in how they implemented the small learning communities, the communities functioned to facilitate communication between teachers within a community. At George, a small K-4 school with about 350 students, two communities were created. To facilitate communication among teachers, teachers from each community met once a week for an hour during the school day. With this arrangement and schedule, teachers were better able to share instructional strategies and ideas, knew the students in the other grades better, and used the community to organize cross-grade peer tutoring.

The learning communities facilitated professional development and instructional innovation at other schools as well. At Jane, a pre-kindergarten through fifth-grade school with about 400 students, the small learning community facilitated teachers working together on lesson plans, projects, and the development of assessment tools. One teacher reported learning hands-on teaching techniques from another teacher and using them in the classroom. The communities worked together to develop a math assessment based on the district's standards. The effects of the small learning community were more limited at Lucy, perhaps because the school has not yet established a regular time for teachers to meet. Lucy is a large school, with over a 1,000 students located in three different buildings.

Frank, a kindergarten through fifth-grade school with almost 800 students, has not yet implemented small learning communities. Instead, they are implementing an arrangement called "looping" where one teacher has the same group of students for two years. This program is limited to two loops and four teachers (two teachers in a first- and second-grade loop, and a second pair of teachers for the third- and fourth-grade loop). The two teachers in the third- and fourth-grade loop thought looping was "wonderful" and helped them teach more effectively. They said that focusing their attention on the same group of students for two years in a row has allowed them the time to develop a good mentoring relationship with each individual child. [16]

Not only does personal attention help them understand each student's particular strengths and weaknesses, but the teachers report that it seems to give the students a sense of continuity that many of

[16]Interview with two fourth grade teachers, Frank Elementary School, 11-22-96.

their at-risk children do not have outside the classrooms. One teacher said that when her former third-grade students returned to her classroom after summer vacation, it was easy to "pick up where they left off."[17] She reported that she was already familiar with their academic abilities, and personalities, so she didn't have to waste time assessing their aptitudes, explaining rules, and establishing the teaching relationship. The students were familiar with each other and the classroom rules and expectations, so they were ready to begin learning at the next academic level. Not only that, but the two teachers in the loop said that the arrangement allowed them to collaborate more readily with each other. For example, they were more able to share instructional materials, discuss teaching strategies, and meet regularly.[18]

The principal has advocated looping as an advantageous instructional strategy and a way to improve school organization, and he has encouraged the teachers to lead workshops with colleagues in order to teach others how to start looping in their classrooms.[19] The school considered looping as a type of small learning community and a prototype for the future development of such communities at their school.

Local Decisionmaking

Under the *Children Achieving* initiative, local decisionmaking has been identified as one of the goals of reform. To accomplish this goal, the district has planned to reorganize so that "schools make the important decisions around teaching and learning, and the central office sets standards, assesses progress, monitors for equity, and acts as a guide and provider of resources and support."[20] The reorganization of the district into clusters, schools into small learning communities, and the central office into service centers, plus the establishment of school councils at each school and cluster councils in each cluster, are the primary strategies designed to increase local decisionmaking.

The school council, is composed of the principal, and teacher and parent representatives elected by the school community. The size of the council varies, depending on school size, but it must have at least 51% teacher representation. Interim councils exist until at least 35% of the student households vote

[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Interview with Frank Elementary principal, 11-22-96.
[20]The School District of Philadelphia. *Children Achieving Action Design 1995-1999*, p. III-1.

(a "household vote" is counted when one adult from the household votes in the election). Three of the four schools in our study met this criteria and had fully functioning school councils by fall 1996. One cluster leader claimed that the criteria for school council elections is too rigid, and the 35% household vote requirement sometimes presents an obstacle where levels of parent involvement are low.[21] Under the *Children Achieving* plan, the council is responsible for schoolwide policies, oversight of shared resources, including food services, health care services, higher level courses, interscholastic athletics, library services, security, transportation, and facilities operation and maintenance, and the review of small learning community budgets.[22]

At the site level, teachers report increased involvement in decisionmaking. Teachers serve on committees, and participate in grade group meetings, and are members of the school's the leadership teams. They help to develop a school mission and focus, assist in writing the school improvement plan, identify students not performing well, and recommend instructional strategies for working with specific individuals. However, it is hard to differentiate current reform initiatives from past practice. Indeed, the School Councils replace, or in most cases, duplicate, the pre-existing leadership team. Group meetings by grade level also predate the current reform, and each school has a building committee that is required by union contract.

At the cluster, there is a cluster council composed of the cluster leader and representatives from each school, including the principal, building representative (union representative), and community representative. The council meets once a month to make budget and program decisions. For example, one council decided to pilot a school-to-career program and develop an affiliation with a national educational coalition.

Local authority, however, is constrained by state and district policies and by union agreements. This is the case in teacher hiring, school-level organization, and many budget decisions. For example, teachers are hired by the district and placed on an eligibility list, giving schools little choice in the selection of teachers. Decisions a school can make are also limited by the obligation to "meet and agree"

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[21] Interview with Cluster Leader for Frank school's cluster, 11-21-96.
[22] Ibid., p. III-4.

versus "meet and discuss." "Meet and agree" issues are decided by the school staff while "meet and discuss" issues are the responsibility of the principal. The categorization of issues is determined by the district office and follow union contract guidelines. Professional development money, for example, is a "meet and agree" issue, however, the administration added restrictions on how this money could be used when "too many people went out of the district" for conferences.[23] Budget decisions at the school level are a "meet and discuss" issue because of union opposition to budget cuts and teacher involvement in personnel decisions.

Professional Development

As part of the *Children Achieving* initiative, the district provided additional resources for professional development. According to the district plan, this included providing substitutes for teachers, paraprofessionals, and noninstructional staff to attend professional development meetings, training for new teachers, support for school planning to develop small learning communities, training for professional development leaders in the teaching and learning network, school council training, and the development of an ongoing training program for cluster leaders.

The availability of additional resources for professional development was noted by teachers in all four of the schools we visited. How this money was used seems to fall into two categories. First, professional development included meetings and training to support the implementation of the reform agenda. A portion of the professional development money was spent to support schoolwide meetings to develop the school plan and plan for small learning communities. Teachers were also compensated for attending cluster meetings with professional development funds. One professional development activity that emerged was a focus on technology. Several teachers reported learning how to use e-mail. Second, professional development funds supported the professional activities of teachers, with money allocated for teachers to attend off-site conferences. In one school, five teachers attended reading conferences—four of them attended a conference conducted by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and one went to a meeting held by the International Reading Association. In addition, four

[23]Personal interview, George school principal, May 16, 1996.

teachers went to a conference on the National Council of Teachers in Mathematics standards, and one attended the Council on Exceptional Children meeting. The principal attended the National School Conference Institute. Because of ongoing budget deficits, the additional staff development money is unlikely to continue at current levels, especially when the cluster initiative is expanded districtwide.

To enhance staff development, a teaching and learning network was established in each of the clusters. This is designed to provide cluster support to teachers for improving instructional strategies and to assist learning communities and schools in developing instructional programs. The network includes a coordinator and six to eight facilitators for each cluster. The network is structured to train selected teachers and principals from each school, who then provide turn-around training in the schools. It also provides staff development on such things as the development of small learning communities, team building, and the implementation of standards. One important responsibility is to provide training and support for new teachers.

The impact of the teaching and learning network varies at the school site. Clearly, it reaches those teachers who are active on various school teams. Each school selects teacher representatives to serve on the various teams. These teams meet regularly with the cluster leaders to receive training and information. They are responsible to take this information back to the schools and provide turn-around training for teachers. For example, one teaching and learning coordinator reported working with a standards team, a math, science, and technology resource team, and an early childhood nucleus that supports performance-based assessment for kindergarten through second grade. These teams meet every four to six weeks with the cluster personnel and receive training or information relevant to the particular team. However, few classroom teachers stated that they knew what the teaching and learning network was, and many did not differentiate it from the pre-existing instructional support team.[24] Others saw it as a reconfiguration of a district instructional support program that merely used the same people, moved from the district to the cluster, and differed only in program origination. It could be that teachers failed

[24] Pennsylvania special education regulations mandate that schools implement the Pennsylvania Instructional Support Team model if they receive special education money. The Instructional Support Team model evaluates poorly performing students and develops strategies to work with these students. This model continues to operate, and has not been fully incorporated into the new structures.

to connect training to the teaching and learning network since teachers within the school were providing turn-around training.

Some teachers report that the current efforts to improve professional development have not really had much effect on how they actually teach in the classroom. One teacher at George Elementary School remarked that *Children Achieving* has increased the number of meetings she has had to attend, meetings which she and many of her colleagues considered unnecessary. When discussing a workshop where teachers were supposed to identify and discuss academic standards for third graders, she questioned the workshop's usefulness. "It's obvious what standards we are supposed to be teaching," she stated, "It's right there in the textbook the district bought for us to use. It's silly to spend time on this in professional development workshops; it really doesn't tell us anything new."[25]

Classroom Level

The challenge of implementing reform at the classroom level is to develop curriculum and instructional practices that allow teachers to work with students of different ability levels (Barr and Dreeben, 1984). In the School District of Philadelphia, the implementation of schoolwide projects allowed teachers to develop alternatives to the pullout programs typical of traditional Title I programs. It also meant that schools no longer identified students as Title I, and instead developed strategies to work with the lowest performing students or otherwise accommodate the different ability levels within the classroom. In examining the effects of the Philadelphia reform on curriculum and instruction for Title I students, we looked for strategies and practices that integrated the curriculum for Title I students with that of the rest of the class. Since the schoolwide program had been in operation for several years, we attempted to identify changes or improvements that the reform brought to the delivery of services for at risk children.

Instructional Innovation

There is a districtwide move to focus on higher order thinking skills and link all areas of the curriculum. The cluster office is the mechanism to translate these goals into practice at the school site.

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[25]Interview with third-grade teacher, George Elementary School, 11-21-96.

To achieve these goals, the use of thematic units, interdisciplinary cross-curriculum instruction, and standards are promoted. Indeed, all four of our schools recently adopted a new language curriculum and updated math textbooks to conform to the standards set by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Further changes are expected with the implementation of small learning communities since this is intended to give schools more flexibility in the design of the curriculum, as long as it is tied to standards that the district are developing. Several constraints on local autonomy were removed when the district eliminated the *Standardized Curriculum, Instructional Planning Guides,* and *Marking Guidelines.*[26] Beginning in the fall of 1996, these are being replaced with standards for mathematics, the English language arts, science, and the arts that present "what students should learn and teachers should teach to improve academic achievement."[27]

The adoption of a new language curriculum does not guarantee instructional change or student progress since schools differed in how they implemented the program. Program implementation at the school level seems to be de-coupled from district reform initiatives. One of the schools (George) that adopted a whole language curriculum recognized that the program would have to be monitored to determine if it could accommodate all students. To do this, the school eliminated pullout programs, delivered all language arts instruction in the classroom, and monitored student progress. Students who failed to progress were tested and strategies developed to aid them. This included one-on-one help from the teacher and from parent volunteers in the classroom.

Jane Elementary School, recognizing that all students in a grade may not be at the same reading level, organized students into groups according to their instructional level. Groups were smaller than grade groups and met with a reading teacher for one hour a day. These groups continued to meet after the school developed into small learning communities. Two of the schools we visited did not depart from a programmatic approach to the implementation of the language curriculum.

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[26] The *Standardized Curriculum* presented the curriculum that was to be taught and covered the scope and sequencing of each subject area. The *Instructional Planning Guides* were intended to assist teachers with the organization of the delivery of instruction, and the *Marking Guidelines* provided grading criteria.

[27] School District of Philadelphia, *Recommended Content Standards, Benchmarks, and Performance Examples - August 26, 1996.* Philadelphia: Office of Standards, Equity & Student Services, School District of Philadelphia, 1996, p. vii.

Teachers at Lucy Elementary School continued to assign classroom assistants or basic skills teachers to work with the lowest performing students in their classroom. This was also the approach they used after implementing small learning communities. To accommodate different ability levels, teachers used partnering, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, and small groups. Frank Elementary School teachers also identified students needing extra help and provided that help through small group instruction in the classroom or in pullout groups. Every teacher has an assistant in the room for three hours a day who worked with the low performing students in small groups. Moreover, the type of specific support that schools received from the cluster office to facilitate the implementation of the language curriculum, aside from the general, professional development of teachers, is unclear.

In examining how the implementation of the *Children Achieving* agenda affected classroom practices for Title I students in schoolwide sites, we observed similarities in instructional strategies used at the four schools. These strategies facilitate working with students of different ability levels within the same large classroom group and include peer tutoring, cooperative learning, paired/shared reading, and use of a half-time classroom assistant. There were differences, however, between schools' abilities to relate these strategies to a schoolwide goal or vision. There were two schools that integrated the schoolwide goal with instructional practices and two that did not, focusing instead on individual remediation.

For example, to improve reading schoolwide, teachers at Jane Elementary School developed a reading program that places students in groups according to their reading level. These groups meet for one hour a day. To make sure all students are progressing at grade level, George Elementary School fourth-grade teachers developed a pacing schedule, adopted a reading program designed to serve students of all ability levels in the classroom, and used resource staff to support teachers with students not performing well. Both the Frank school and the Lucy school, on the other hand, identified students needing extra help and provided that help through small group instruction in the classroom or in pullout groups. While Lucy identified reading as the school focus, they have not developed a program that integrates this goal across the school curriculum for all ability levels.

Likewise, the cluster has increased attention to developing a school mission at Frank Elementary School. The cluster wants the school to develop a school improvement plan that is "very specific and performance driven," with a focus on instruction.[28] The principal said the school mission is tied to the cluster goal demanding that "All children achieve at high levels." To achieve these goals, they adapted focused instructional strategies to meet the needs of those not excelling academically. These differences between schools seem to predate the cluster initiative and remain unchanged after the first year of implementing the *Children Achieving* agenda. Small learning communities, which are designed to increase communication between teachers, hold the potential to affect instructional practices. However, it is too early to tell how the small learning community concept will directly affect instructional practices.

Because of the reform agenda, the schools are in transition from one set of instructional programs for Title I students to another. For example, in the 1995-96 school year, the schools had a basic skills program. The basic skills program typically included a program support teacher and a basic skills teacher. The program support position was designed to provide assistance teachers in the classroom in various capacities, including mentoring, co-teaching, and providing demonstration lessons. The basic skills teacher worked with low-performing students to improve their reading skills. This program existed for two years. With the implementation of small learning communities in the Fall of 1996, the basic skills program was eliminated and, in most cases, the basic skills teacher or program support teacher became the small learning community coordinator beginning in Fall 1996 (the small learning community coordinator position was advertised and candidates applied for the position). Another program intended to improve the math skills of low-performing students began in 1972 and is Title I funded. Generally, Title I money funds one or more elementary math resource teacher (EMRT) in each school to work with individual students. In some schools, the EMRT also provides program support to teachers. This program remained unchanged with the implementation of small learning communities.

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[28]Personal interview, Frank school principal, May 14, 1996.

Standards clearly articulated by the district offer the opportunity for schools to have consistent and uniform curriculum goals for all students. The Philadelphia district began implementing the uniform standards at the beginning of the 1996-97 school year. It is too early to determine if and how these standards will change instructional practices and guide teachers as they design curriculum. Likewise, it is too early to evaluate how organizing schools into small learning communities affects programs for students at risk.

Conclusion

The *Children Achieving* agenda relies on two school-reform strategies that are likely to impact Title I schoolwide projects. The first strategy relies on standardized and centralized policies, such as the adoption of uniform academic standards and alternative performance assessments, to which all schools must adhere. The second strategy is the development of structures intended to increase lateral communication between teachers and includes the reorganization of the district into clusters, and schools into small learning communities. These dual strategies find substantial congruence with Title I schoolwide programs. Both the Philadelphia *Children Achieving* agenda and Title I schoolwide reforms share some program priorities. They both regard parental and community involvement, local decisionmaking, early intervention through full day kindergartens, and support for professional development as integral components. Both reform programs support the idea that all children can learn, and both promote academic achievement as a primary goal. It remains unclear, however, if schoolwide programs and the Philadelphia reform agenda are providing the increased learning time and content coverage that are central to improving student achievement (Barr and Dreeben, 1983; Gamoran and Dreeben, 1986; Harnischfeger and Wiley, 1976). If these issues can be systematically addressed at both the district and classroom levels, then both the *Children Achieving* and the Title I schoolwide reforms can reduce the level of instructional and institutional fragmentation in Philadelphia's schools.

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APPENDIX
Children Achieving - Key Indicators

Summarized from School District of Philadelphia, "*Children Achieving: Action Design*," February 6, 1995.

I. High Expectations

1. Establish standards
2. Develop opportunity-to-learn standards
    a. Ensure schools provide an environment that is safe and conducive to learning
    b. Ensure schools treat students as active learners
    c. Redesign schedules, curricula, instructional strategies and assessments to give all students the time they need to meet the academic standards
    d. Integrate academic and career preparation rather than a two-tiered system of college-bound and career-bound
    e. Have adequate, diverse, and quality staff
    f. Have parental and community supports, access to needed health and social services, and preschool availability
    g. Offer appropriate school and grade-level organization with challenging content
    h. Distribute resources at the school level equitably and adequately
3. Develop a flexible culture at all levels
4. Create an central Office of Equity Assurance

II. Performance Driven

1. Implement a system of performance-based assessment tied to standards
2. Develop valid assessments for ESOL students
3. Design an accountability system that links student achievement to rewards/penalties for the staff
4. Establish central Office of Standards, Assessment, & Accountability
5. Provide incentives to students by improving access to jobs and college

III. Local Decisionmaking

1. Organize schools into small learning communities of 200-500 students
2. Establish school councils with governance over school-wide policies and resources
3. Reorganize schools into feeder patterns into 22 clusters
    a. cluster funding
    b. cluster leader
    c. cluster council
    d. teaching & learning network
    e. family resource network
    f. k-12 articulation
    g. reallocation of services and personnel
4. Restructure central office to be responsive to clusters, schools, and small learning communities
5. Allocate decisions about resources to schools
6. Develop a system of client centered services and supports, including the establishment of three service centers: Instructional Program Support Center, Information Management and Technology Support Service Center, and Administrative Support Center

IV. Professional Development

"The goal of professional development will be to enable every teacher, administrator, and staff member to develop the knowledge, skills and behavior required to create learning settings which enable all students to demonstrate high levels of achievement." (p. IV-1)

1. Provide resources in terms of time and money
2. Provide effective mechanisms for universal assess of professional development resources
    a. Establish a Teaching and Learning Network
    b. Establish a central Office of Professional Development
    c. Establish an initiative to encourage teachers to pursue certification from the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards
3. Provide specific professional development opportunities targeted to identified needs for action
    a. Training in effective teaching and child development for new kindergarten teachers
    b. Training for new teachers
    c. Planning support for small learning communities, training for professional development leaders in the Teaching and Learning Network, training for school councils, training for cluster leaders (training provided by the Office of Professional Development and partner organizations)

V. Readiness for school

1. Full-day kindergarten
2. Design a Children and Family Authority with the Departments of Health and Human Service
3. Transfer programs, services, and programs to Children and Family Authority

VI. Community Services and Support

1. Link students and families with health and social service supports
    a. Each school must provide adequate nursing services
    b. Each school should build on their capacity to link children with services and follow-up, provide family support and parent education programs
    c. Establish a Family Resource Network at the cluster level to provide linkage, support, outreach, and access to services
2. Link schools with at least on community-based organization by 1999
3. Develop and sustain a 10,000 volunteers campaign
    a. Family Resource Network with support from Office of Professional Development and the Office of Equity Assurance will train school staff in how to use volunteers, and train volunteers
4. Conduct a campaign to prevent first pregnancies, insure assess to health and social services for pregnant students
5. Ensure a school climate which is safe and conducive to student learning

VII. Technology and Instructional Materials

1. Provide all schools with resources and support to introduce technology into the classroom, with a goal of one computer for every student (i.e., develop a districtwide technology plan)
2. Transform school libraries into technology resource centers
3. Consolidate the district's technology infrastructure into the Information Management and Technology Service Center
4. Review district capital and operating expenditures to support technology, develop a five-year budget

VIII. Public Engagement

1. Listen to the community
2. Develop a report card to measure district performance (accountability measure)
3. Communicate with the community
4. Support the Alliance for Public School Advocates
5. Build capacity of the whole system to be better ambassadors for high-quality education

IX. Resources

1. Increase efficiency and effectiveness in key noninstructional areas
2. Investigate alternative financing opportunities
3. Make optimal use of existing space and plan strategically for future space requirements
4. Use all available resources
5. Augment district's operating budget with private resources
6. Pursue equity and adequacy of federal, state, and city funds
7. Redesign teaching and learning so that *who, how, where,* and *when* are viewed as the variables and *student achievement* remains the constant

X. Comprehensive and Integrated

"The *Children Achieving* agenda is not a "pick and choose menu." We must approach the challenge of education reform in a comprehensive and integrated way. If one or more features of the whole agenda is not implemented, its power to yield high achievement by all students will be significantly diminished." (p. X-1)

The Laboratory for Student Success

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of ten regional educational laboratories in the nation funded by the U.S. Department of Education to revitalize and reform educational practice in the service of children and youth.

The mission of the Laboratory for Student Success is to strengthen the capacity of the mid-Atlantic region to enact and sustain lasting systemic educational reform through collaborative programs of applied research and development and services to the field. In particular, the LSS facilitates the transformation of research-based knowledge into useful tools that can be readily integrated into the educational reform process both regionally and nationally. To ensure a high degree of effectiveness, the work of the LSS is continuously refined based on feedback from the field on what is working and what is needed in improving educational practice.

The ultimate goal of the LSS is the formation of a connected system of schools, parents, community agencies, professional organizations, and institutions of higher education that serves the needs of all students and is linked with a high-tech national system for information exchange. In particular, the aim is to bring researchers and research-based knowledge into synergistic coordination with other efforts for educational improvement led by field-based professionals.

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